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SUBJECT: DAILY SUMMARY OF JAPANESE PRESS 07/19/07

Index:

(1) Kashiwazaki City orders suspension of nuclear power plant due to growing distrust

(2) A study of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, a "spoiled rich kid" (Part 2): Strong sense of obligation and friendship

(3) "Next-phase action" coming into focus at resumed six-party talks

ARTICLES:

(1) Kashiwazaki City orders suspension of nuclear power plant due to growing distrust

ASAHI (Page 2) (Full)
July 19, 2007

The order for an emergency suspension of the Kashiwazaki nuclear power plant issued by Hiroshi Aida, mayor of Kashiwazaki City, Niigata Prefecture, is creating a stir. The castle town that houses the nuclear power plant that has been dependent on subsidies for hosting that plant has finally taken a strong stance of lodging a protest. After receiving that shockwave, Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) has had to ask other utility companies to supply power. However, there is unabated concern about whether the company can get by this summer, when the usual heat waves are expected to

come. There is no outlook for resuming plant operations, since there are many barriers to clear before that can be done.

Mayor makes decision, following successive glitches

Mayor Aida, who has issued the emergency order to suspend at 11:00 a.m. on July 18 the use of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant based on the Fire Defense Law called in TEPCO President Katsumata to the Kashiwazaki City Office and told him in a harsh tone: "A tremor exceeding the intensity anticipated when designing the plant has occurred. Discussing the safety of a nuclear power plant and ground is an issue that cannot be slighted."

Behind the mayor's decision are the irregularities that TEPCO was responsible for five years ago. In February 2002, when TEPCO found glitches at three nuclear power plants, including Kashiwazaki, it carried out illicit practices, such as fabricating inspection results and repair records, and recording false information.

In Kashiwazaki City and Kariwa Village, which host the nuclear plant, residents' concern has grown over its plutermal energy program for recycling spent nuclear fuel. Then Kashiwazaki Mayor Masazumi Nishikawa, Kariwa Village Mayor Hiroo Shinada, and the Niigata Governor Ikuo Hirayama agreed to cancel a prior approval given to TEPCO and withdrew the plan.

A mayoral election took place in Nov. 2004. Nishikawa sought a fourth election, obtaining recommendation from the LDP and the New Komeito. Pro-citizen Aida, former environment department chief of Nagaoka City, also ran in the election a contender. Aida won a close contest, backed by votes from those who were against the construction of a nuclear power plant and votes from labor unions. During the election campaign, he insisted on the need to seek

TOKYO 00003311 002 OF 006

further information disclosure, premised on the securing of the safety of a nuclear power plant.

When it was found this May that TEPCO hid troubles that had occurred at the Kashiwazaki nuclear power plant, he was furious, saying, "The corporate structure that has given priority not to safety but to operations is a problem." For that reason alone, the series of troubles following the quake were impermissible for him.

When Aida ordered the suspension of the operation of the plant, President Katsumata admitted that fire extinction equipment was insufficient. However, regarding the structure of the nuclear power plant, he said, "We were comparatively able to secure safety. I feel there is no problem."

Aida brushed aside his comment with an unpleasant look, "The city will confer on the nuclear power plant's fire extinction system as a business establishment." Meeting the press in the evening, Mayor Aida, after citing a major benefit of hosting a nuclear power in terms of local district development, noted, "The major premise is safety. It could not be helped that the operations automatically stopped due to the quake intensity stronger than anticipated. However, I as the mayor of the city cannot grant approval for the operation of facilities." He hinted that his order for suspension included a disciplinary meaning with importance given to the series of mismanagement.

Many barriers to clear before resuming operations

TEPCO said that there are no prospects for resuming the operations of seven reactors at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant. There are many barriers to clear before resuming operations, including a revision of earthquake resistance evaluation gauged at the time when the plant was designed, consideration to the need for reinforcement work, government inspection and approval from local governments hosting the facility.

The Onagawa nuclear power plant was jolted by a stronger earthquake than anticipated as was the case this time when the Miyagi Earthquake occurred in Aug. 2005. There was no need for reinforcing earthquake resistance there. Nevertheless, even in the fastest case

of no. 2 reactor, it took five months to resume operation. It took a year and nine months for the no. 1 reactor to resume operation. The delay is largely attributable to the fact that it was necessary to ensure that nuclear reactors can endure the maximum earthquake that could occur.

It will take time to analyze what impact key equipment, such as reactor pressure vessels, received in the quake this time. If problems are found, the intensity assumption has to be revised. Hokuriku Electric Power Company, which is investigating into the impact of the Noto Peninsular Earthquake occurred this March on the Shiga nuclear power plant, has not yet submitted a final report to the government.

The safety determination process involves the government determining whether there is any problem about inspections carried out by utility companies and reaching a decision on each nuclear reactor, based on discussions pursued by an advisory council consisting of experts. It would take even longer time for a utility company to resume operation of reactors, if they are identified as requiring earthquake resistance reinforcement. Even if the company obtains

TOKYO 00003311 003 OF 006

government approval for reinforcement work and the reactors in question undergo the work, it still needs to receive certification proving that the work was conducted correctly. Approval of local governments hosting the nuclear power plant in question is also necessary. The local governments will independently determine safety.

There were only 9 kilometers from the nuclear power station to the point right above the epicenter. TEPCO carried out a geological survey around the nuclear power plant until this April, based on the new quake resistance guidelines, which the government set last September. However, the survey did not cover the sea floor. It did not consider the existence of the active fault, which is assumed to have caused the quake this time.

Following the quake, TEPCO decided to conduct an additional geological survey. If the survey confirms the existence of an active fault, it is bound to affect safety evaluation and approval by local governments hosting the nuclear power plant.

(2) A study of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, a "spoiled rich kid" (Part 2): Strong sense of obligation and friendship

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 24) (Abridged)
July 15, 2007

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe dined with a dozen or so Liberal Democratic Party lawmakers on the night of May 29, the day after Agriculture Minister Toshikatsu Matsuoka committed suicide. At the dinner table, an unusually eloquent Abe affectionately described Matsuoka this way: "Mr. Matsuoka played a central role in making arrangements for everything from beef imports from the United States to rice exports to China to my meeting with Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao. He was always highly committed to his job."

One of the participants took Abe's words as an act to defend himself as the person who had appointed Matsuoka. Lawmaker Katsuei Hirasawa, 61, who once tutored Abe when he was a primary school student, took it differently. He said: "The prime minister is a gentle person. I believe he couldn't help but make such a comment for the sake of Mr. Matsuoka's honor"

Abe has a tendency to remain loyal to his sympathizers, whether they be friend or foe.

Former House of Representatives lawmaker Kiyoshi Ueda, 59, left the Democratic Party of Japan in August 2003 to run in the Saitama gubernatorial race, which he won. Days before the election, Ueda unexpectedly received an encouraging message from Abe, his friend, which read: "I had been asked by the LDP Saitama chapter to stump for your rival at four locations, but I have decided to do so only at one place."

"I keenly felt his consideration," Ueda said, looking back at the incident.

Abe also allowed Seiichi Eto, 59, a postal rebel and another close friend, to rejoin the LDP in the face of strong objections from within the party.

Three key players in the Abe cabinet resigned in succession soon after Abe took office. The first was Masaaki Honma, who resigned as

TOKYO 00003311 004 OF 006

the government's tax commission chief last December due to his use of a government apartment to house his mistress. Then came the resignation of Regulatory Reform Minister Genichiro Sata over his shady office expenses. Abe at first staunchly defended Honma and Sata. Sata's resignation was followed by the case of Defense Minister Fumio Kyuma, 66, who stepped down in late June over his atomic-bombings-couldn't-be-helped remarks. Abe again defended Kyuma until he tendered his resignation.

Eiji Oshita, 63, the author of Abe-ke Sandai: Abe Shinzo (Third-Generation Politician, Shinzo Abe) explained Abe's indecisiveness about sacking cabinet ministers this way: "The gentle DNA Abe inherited from his father, Shintaro Abe, crops up whenever he is faced with a difficult personnel decision. Becoming a great commander takes the guts to ax people as necessary."

As Matsuoka's successor, Abe picked Norihiko Akagi, 48, deputy head of a group of junior lawmakers who support visits to Yasukuni Shrine. Akagi is ideologically close to Abe, and his grandfather once served as defense chief in the cabinet of Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi, Abe's grandfather. Abe defended Akagi when an office expense scandal broke out, saying, "His political organization declared 800 yen as monthly utility expenses, but I won't let him go just because of that." This visibly disappointed Oshita.

Oshita noted:

"There was no need for the prime minister to bring up the 800 yen example to defend Akagi, who is in the hot seat. It reminded me of Abe's words that ruled out any investigation after Matsuoka's suicide. Mr. Abe is honest, or rather immature."

In his debate with DPJ President Ichiro Ozawa on July 1, Abe fervently said: "I would like to see children grow up to be courageous enough to protect friends from bullying and stand up for them."

Abe's junior high school classmate, Yojiro Tanii, 52, still vividly remembers Abe who stood up for friends against bullies. "He was not good at fighting, but he never left friends behind," Tanii said.

Shinzo Abe's mettle is being tested as prime minister instead of as a person with a strong sense of obligation and friendship.

(3) "Next-phase action" coming into focus at resumed six-party talks

ASAHI (Page 15) (Full)
July 19, 2007

Hajime Izumi, professor of politics on the Korean Peninsula at University of Shizuoka

The chief delegates to the six-party talks resumed discussion in Beijing after a hiatus of four months. One major purpose of the meeting is to deal with the question of how specifically to facilitate the "next-phase action" toward denuclearization, now that North Korea shut down its nuclear facility at Yongbyon.

The US top envoy to the six-party talks, Christopher Hill, assistant secretary of state, has come up with an immediate timetable aimed at

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completing the "next-phase action" by the end of the year,

suggesting first creating a "road map" for the completion of the next-phase steps, next holding a working group meeting that will be followed by a plenary session of the six-party member nations, and then holding a six-party foreign ministerial by the first week of September.

I think it is possible to translate all those plans into action. The US allowed the North Korean money that had been frozen at a Macao bank to be transferred to North Korea, and that in exchange for that, the North shut down its nuclear facilities. Since then, a kind of relationship of mutual trust has been emerging between the two countries. Given this, it would not be much difficult to confirm a "road map" and arrange a timeframe for discussions.

However, actually implementing the "next-phase action" is not an easy task. The six-party agreement made on February 13 has put North Korea under obligation to implement two things: submission of a full declaration of all of its nuclear programs and disablement of all of its nuclear facilities. It is, however, too optimistic to expect North Korea to implement them strictly. Obviously, it is well imagined how difficult it is for the North to do, given measures the North must undertake in that regard.

As for a full declaration, the North Koreans need to admit the existence of their uranium enrichment activity. Regarding the disablement, the North Koreans must undertake steps to disable the operations of the five-megawatt nuclear reactor as well as the nuclear fuel reprocessing plant. Also, they need to make it impossible to reprocess 8,000 fuel rods used to operate the five-megawatt nuclear reactor.

All these are deemed Washington's "minimum demands" on Pyongyang, but it is unthinkable for the North to accept them without any objection. North Korea is likely to contend strongly that "disablement" does not mean indefinitely sealing nuclear facilities.

In short, it is unlikely that the US and North Korea will easily come to a compromise over the "next-phase action."

Should Pyongyang deem Washington's "returns" as attractive, the North could implement the "minimum action" demanded by Washington.

The Bush administration turned around its previous policy and now appears willing to advance talks on building a peace mechanism for the Korean Peninsula even before the North becomes nuclear-free. This policy switch reflects the Bush administration's strong interest in putting an end to the Cold-War structure left on the Korean Peninsula. This is certain to give a strong incentive to the North, too.

Once a six-party foreign ministerial session takes place, four-party talks among North and South Korea, the US, and China aimed at creating a peace mechanism for the Korean Peninsula will be set in motion. I cannot rule out the possibility that in that process, North Korea will move to fulfill the obligations set forth in the "next-phase action."

Should Japan continue to give the highest priority to progress on the abduction issue as it has in the past and remain unwilling to play a part in building a peace mechanism for the Korean Peninsula, the role Japan will play for the peace, stability, and security of

TOKYO 00003311 006 OF 006

East Asia will be severely limited.

It is high time for Japan to restudy its previous North Korea policy.

SCHIEFFER